Inside the Wire
Ohakea Proud, our People, our Stories
06 November 2026

Innovation – part of our Air Warfighting Ethos

Continuing the theme of excellence, below are a few examples of significant engineering initiatives that are currently underway.

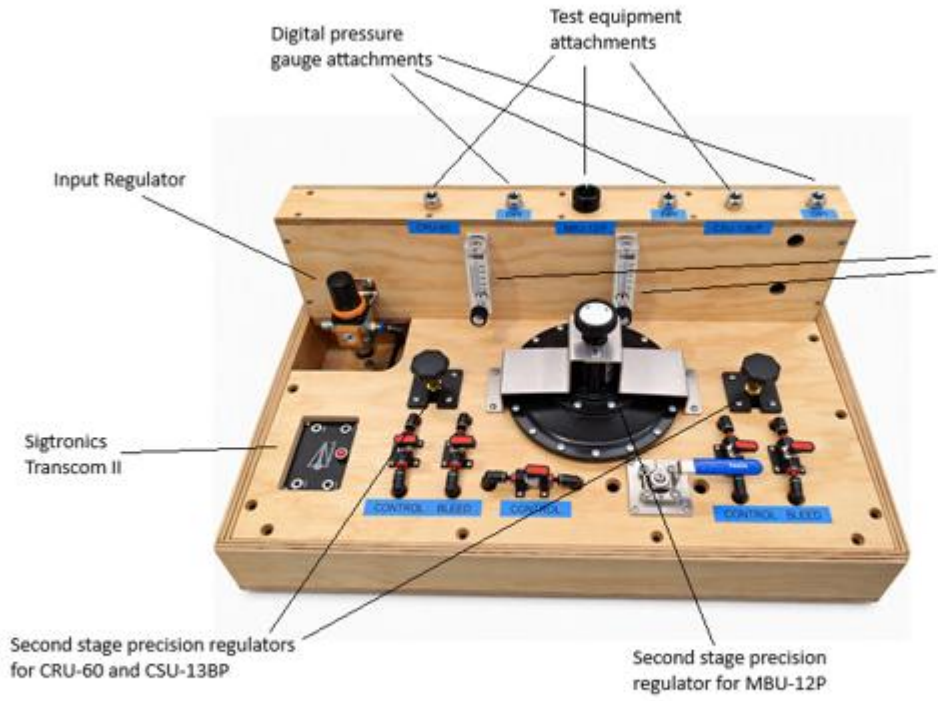


Figure 1 The Ellery Prototype



Figure 2 The Ellery Actual

- Design of a new T-6C oxygen test equipment. The two OEM provided units in current use are obsolete and unreliable. Not having these would directly compromise our ability to fit masks and conduct leak tests on critical aircrew safety equipment. With no external solutions on offer and without being specifically tasked to do so, FLTLT Ellery designed and subsequently produced his own unit - “the Ellery”. This involved some creative reverse engineering, his own design work and the use of off the shelf components. The unit has been tested and trialled satisfactorily and is currently going through its final stages of design checking before release to service. Having this unit significantly de-risks T6 operations and it has potential utility for C-130J mask testing also.

- Personal Locator Beacons – we have over 500 PLBs in service and when we were recently unable to procure the required replacement battery packs, Avionics Ohakea designed, tested and produced their own solution. This included the use of additive manufacturing to produce some of the required components. Credit to CPL Schawrz for the design work and FGOFF Kropp for the engineering certification. The result ensured that we avoided what otherwise would have been a significant issue for every fleet.

- Harpoon firing – when the idea to generate this capability within six months was first mooted, there was a fair amount of scepticism about whether we could pull this off in that timeframe. It was only the result of a significant amount of initiative and innovation from a number of people involved that we managed it. Even at the 11th hour complex challenges were being identified and fixed at short notice – well done to everyone involved.

- S&S – our Cargo Parachutes use a de-reefing mechanism to delay and slow the canopy deployment. The current pyrotechnic solution has become prohibitively expensive, and our S&S team have identified a re-usable mechanical

solution with the potential to save NZDF millions over the original design. This equipment is currently in the process of being procured and introduced into service.

This list could go on.

Innovations such as these are not a rare occurrence within our workforce – we have talented people everywhere. I often hear feedback that good ideas are not pushed forward because they are unlikely to be supported. While it is true that not all good ideas can be realised and we do have to choose what we get after carefully. That should not stop ideas from being raised in the first place. Having an innovative culture where we are prepared to think critically and challenge the status quo is a key component of readiness and is something that can give us an edge. So, I encourage you all to continue to be bold with your ideas - push them forward. Where the idea is technical in nature, the CAMO staff are on hand to help - our task is to provide engineering solutions in support of mission capable aircraft. *Article Credit – WGCDR Jamie Wallace*

ACC Commendations

Last Thu 29 Oct, ACC AIRCDRE Andy Scott visited Ohakea as part of his last official ACC tour with his CWO W/O Jethro Jeffries. This involved ACC talking to various units around the Base. It also allowed him to present four ACC Commendations to some very deserving Ohakea Aviators and a deserving unit. Congratulations to SGT Kevin Thompson, CPL Jordan Vaile, WGCDR Gareth Case Russell, and the Air Space & Warfare Centre (ASWC) led by GPCAPT Mick Duyvene de Wit. *Photo Credit CPL Rachel Pugh.*









DAA Promotions

Thu 29 Oct saw the departure of two highly experienced operators from the NZ DAA. Fortunately, their loss is the Military Design Organisation's gain, with Adam Breetvelt promoted to SQNLDR and appointed to lead ASI, while "Sommie" Sommerville has been promoted to WGCDR and assumes the role of Head of Design.

These promotions are a fitting recognition of their expertise, professionalism, and contribution to military aviation. Congratulations to both on their well-earned advancement, and best wishes as they take on their new responsibilities within the MDO. *Article Credit – F/S Martin Ellis.*





Te Rapa Award

During last week's training morning CO Materiel Support Wing Ohakea, WGCDR Jones, presented the Te Rapa trophy to SGT Caleb Mahu. This trophy is awarded for trade excellence within Logistics. The criteria for award is as follows:

"On the 02 Oct 2007, an award initiated by DAS(F) was introduced to identify and recognise exemplary performance within the RNZAF Supply Specialisation. The award has been named the Te Rapa Trophy in recognition of the RNZAF Stores Depot that was deemed the cornerstone of modern supply. The intent of the Te Rapa Trophy is to recognise outstanding performance of duties from both the commissioned and non-commissioned ranks within the Logistics Supply Branch. Included in that intent is that the nominee is to have shown exceptional service and dedication whilst carrying out their duties as a Supply specialist".





Caleb's performance within his previous role of Internal MRO was recognised with the award of the trophy, where his citation recognised outstanding contributions to unit capability and morale, as well as leadership and innovation within sporting and cultural arenas.

A thoroughly deserving award for outstanding performance, well done to Caleb. The ceremony was attended by his wife Kavana, and their son, along with MSW OH colleagues and friends.

Article Credit – W/O Lee Caper.

Help to Ex Serviceperson – Mike Heikell

On the afternoon of Wed 04 Nov, 13 Team Ohakea personnel headed for recently retired WO/FLTLT Mike Heikell's place in Rongotea. Mike has a few acres and a storm back in February damaged a number of fences. Mike needed a bit of hand to get on top of things and make the place more secure for his sheep and so we got to work. We dug in fence posts, rammed in waratahs, reattached broken wires, secured battens and along the way picked up 30 bags of pinecones. A job well done. We are selling the pinecones







with all proceeds going to the Missing Wingman Trust as they kindly provided funding for all the fencing materials. It was an honour to help Mike in his time of need and pay back a little of the kindness and support he has given to so many over his long career in the RNZAF.
Article Credit – Padre Rog Black.

Videographer Training

With the help of the ADF's top videography instructor, the NZDF photography trade has been put through their paces in the first ever video training course run in NZ. They learned how to edit videos efficiently, add and interpret even more screens on their kit, and practiced filming interviews and candid footage with the generous loan of models from 14 SQN, 3 SQN and Security Forces. The photographers would like to apologise to the entire Base, as bringing the cameras out seemed to be what triggered every bucketing of rain we experienced this week!
Article Credit – CPL Rachel Pugh.







Last Word

This week is a bumper issue with lots that has been happening around the Base. From innovation to commendations and everything in-between. Another thing that has happened on Base this week is the opening of the NEQ Coffee Cart (see photos next page). If you are in the area, please pop in and support this and say hi to Sharon who will be making your coffee. There is a rumour there will be a bigger selection of cold drinks and maybe ice blocks coming soon along with some chairs, tables, and sun umbrellas!

A big thanks to WGCDR Jamie Wallace for writing the covering email for this week's ITW. Please keep sending stories to be shared with Team Ohakea to gavin.hey@nzdf.mil.nz.


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Coffee


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